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ABSTRACT

This study used survey data to investigate the level of class consciousness among working class Americans. On a multi-dimensional measure, workers were considered to be class conscious if they identified personally with the working class, felt workers were denied a fair share of society's rewards, considered the interests of workers and management to be at odds, and thought workers should stick together. Questionnaire data were gathered from 1365 workers living in 60 major urban areas. The results demonstrate that in contemporary America class consciousness is not fostered by factory settings which bring large numbers of workers together. This contradicts traditional Marxian theory. Two hypotheses commonly used to explain the low level of class consciousness in America were confirmed. One is that the belief in the individualistic notions which comprise the American dream of success dampens class consciousness. The second is that the general affluence of American society blurs class distinctions. The study also shows that a higher level of worker class consciousness would make little difference to contemporary politics. At the present time class conscious workers are not more politically active than their less conscious counterparts. Numerous graphs and charts are used. (Author/BC)

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Class Consciousness in Contemporary America: What is it? Who has it? What difference does it make?

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SP 011 183

Prepared for delivery at the 1978 Annual Meeting of The American Political Science Association, The New York Hilton Hotel, New York, New York, August 31-September 3, 1978. Copyright by The American Political Science Association, 1978.

In spite of Engels' enthusiastic predictions about how hospitable the "more favored soil of America, where no medieval ruins bar the way,"[1] would be to class struggle, and in spite of a long and sometimes violent history of labor disputes, radical politics on the left has enjoyed little success in America. Observers of American society, including Engels himself, have advanced a large number of theories, ranging from internal disputes within the socialist party to general prosperity and affluence, to explain the failure of socialist politics in the American context.[2] According to the most commonly cited of these explanations, this failure is a function of the failure of the American working class to achieve "true" consciousness: that is, a perception that as workers they are part of a clearly identifiable group, whose members are not only aware of the common interests they share but also willing to organize in opposition to the owners of capital in order to change a system which oppresses them. According to Marx, this collective awareness of commonly held objective interests functions as a lever converting the suffering associated with the conditions of working class oppression into revolutionary activity to change those conditions.

Empirical social scientists have hardly ignored class consciousness as an issue: they have argued about how to measure it and about its impact upon political behavior. However, many of the hypotheses which

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[1] Friedrich Engels, "The Labor Movement in the United States" in Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, ed. by Lewis S. Feuer, Anchor Books (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 491.

[2] These and other such hypotheses are explored in the essays contained in Failure of a Dream ed. by John M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset, Anchor Books (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1974). These essays contain, in addition, extensive bibliographical suggestions.

have been advanced again and again to explain the distinctiveness of the American political experience have never been subjected to the light of data. It is the purpose of this paper to use a multi-faceted measure of class consciousness to test empirically some aspects of the common wisdom about working class politics in America. More specifically:

- The various dimensions of class consciousness will be considered in an attempt to arrive at an acceptable operational definition.

- Next, that definition will be applied to the attitudes of blue-collar workers in contemporary America in order to learn how much class consciousness there is among manual workers these days.

- Then, several commonly held notions about the conditions under which class consciousness incubates will be considered: namely,

  --that circumstances which bring workers into contact with others -- organizationally, in unions, and occupationally, in factories -- tend to foster class consciousness;
  --that competing group loyalties -- in this case, race consciousness -- tend to diminish class consciousness;
  --that belief in the individualistic notions which comprise the American Dream of success tends to vitiate class consciousness;
  --that, in an affluent post-industrial society, class antagonisms -- and, consequently, class consciousness -- tend to decline.

- Finally, the consequences of class consciousness will be examined, testing the Marxian notion that class consciousness is a prerequisite for political mobilization.

It should be made clear at the outset that one important item is not included on this overly ambitious agenda, a serious philosophical discussion of what Marx meant by class consciousness and how the subject has been treated by both his disciples and his critics.[3]

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[3] For those who are interested in a more theoretical approach, Marx's

What Is It?

C. Wright Mills's oft cited definition gives a succinct summary of the various elements which comprise class consciousness:

> Class-consciousness has always been understood as a political consciousness of one's own rational class interests and their opposition to the interests of other classes. Economic potentiality becomes politically realized: a 'class in itself' becomes a 'class for itself.' Thus for class consciousness, there must be (1) a rational awareness and identification with one's own class interests; (2) an awareness of and rejection of other class interests as illegitimate; and (3) an awareness of and a readiness to use collective political means to the collective political end of realizing one's interests.[4]

There is considerable disagreement among social scientists as to how actually to locate class consciousness. The most frequent method is to ask a blue-collar worker to what class he belongs and to consider as class conscious those who identify with the working class.[5] However, as the

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views on class consciousness are contained in a variety of his major works as well as in his correspondence. Among the works in which he discusses class consciousness are: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (New York: International Publishers, 1932); Marx and Engels, The German Ideology (New York: International Publishers, 1939); Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy (New York: International Publishers, 1963).

Discussions of Marx's views of class in general and class consciousness in particular include Ralf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), esp. Chap. I; Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, "Marx's Theory of Social Classes" in Class, Status, and Power (2nd ed., New York: The Free Press, 1966), pp. 6-11; Leonard Reissman, Class in American Society (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 269-290.

Two other articles which present analyses of the multiple dimensions of class consciousness are of relevance here: Richard T. Morris and Raymond J. Murphy, "A Paradigm for the Study of Class Consciousness," Sociology and Social Research, L (April, 1966), 297-313; and Bertell Ollman, "Toward Class Consciousness Next Time: Marx and the Working Class," Politics and Society, III (Fall, 1972), 1-24.

[4] White Collar (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 325.

[5] Even this widely used measure is not without controversy. For a discussion of some of the issues surrounding class self-identification as a measure, see the Appendix to this paper.

quotation from Mills should make clear, identification with the working class would clearly seem necessary for class consciousness; but it hardly seems sufficient. Many who identify with the working class presumably mean by that identification simply that they work for a living. It would seem that only when that identification is coupled with a sense that the members of the working class are the victims of economic injustice because they do not receive their fair share of the fruits of their labor; that the source of this injustice is the fundamental conflict of interests between the working class and the bourgeoisie; and that the means to correct the injustice is through activity with other members of the working class would that identity assume a clearly political potential. Such attitudes would be meaningless for political action if not linked to a sense of personal identification with the working class; on the other hand, such identification would likewise be without political potency unless coupled with a sense of the common interests of working class members and a willingness to act on behalf of those interests.

What Mills's description makes clear is that full class consciousness has multiple dimensions. In recognition of the various aspects of the concept, class consciousness was measured in a number of ways in a recent study of the metropolitan work force: respondents were asked not only about their class identification but also about their sense of the fairness of the economic reward system in America, their sense of conflict between the classes, and their sense of the wisdom of collective action by the working class.[6] It should be made clear that, although these measures do

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[6] The Metropolitan Work Force Survey is a large scale telephone survey of 1365 work force members living in major urban areas conducted in April, 1976 by Sidney Verba and myself. Sixty urban areas were selected with a probability proportional to population. Within these areas respondents

tap several of the dimensions of class consciousness, they in no way measure the kind of revolutionary class consciousness which Marx predicted would emerge within the ranks of the working class. Even if we were to find, on the basis of these measures, a great deal of class consciousness among American workers -- and we will not -- it would be unwise to predict explosive class rebellion on that basis. These questions measure general beliefs about how the world works in class terms, not a commitment to act on behalf of those beliefs, much less a commitment to act aggressively or violently.

Class self-identification: The respondents in the Metropolitan Work Force Survey were first presented an open-ended question about the class to which they thought they belonged. Those who could not answer and those who gave answers which were either ambiguous -- for example, "the lower-middle class" -- or not grounded in class as it is usually construed -- for example, "the average class" or "the liberal class" -- in short, all those who did not answer "middle" or "working," were asked a closed-ended follow-up question in which those two alternatives were offered.

As shown in Figure 1, which reports the responses to these questions for those in white- and blue-collar occupations, there are relatively few work force members who spontaneously identify with the working class.[7]

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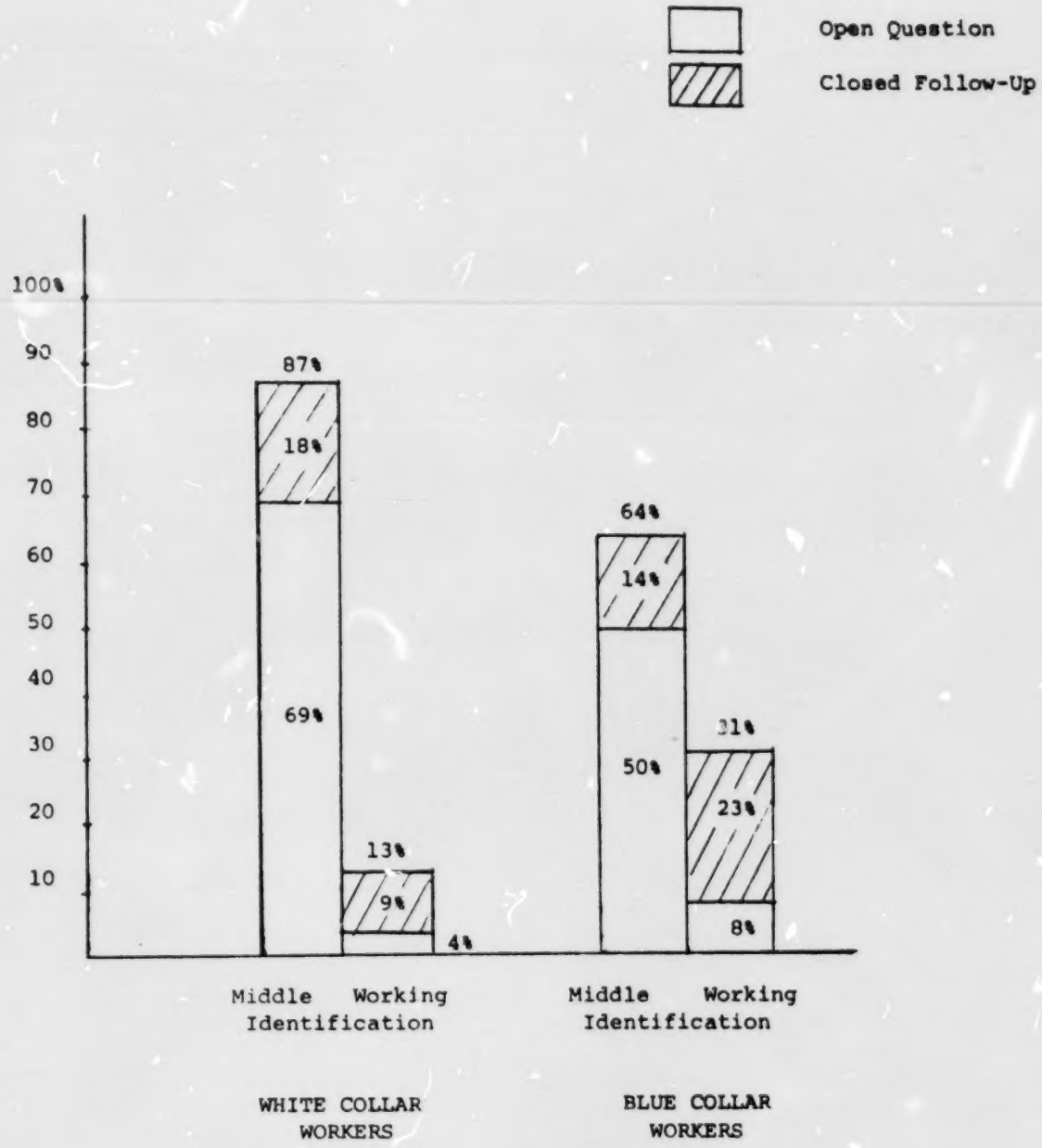
were selected by a "random digit" technique, the universe being members of the work force. Within households, selection among eligible respondents was also random. Unless otherwise noted all data in this paper are from this survey. (It should be noted that, for purposes irrelevant to this paper, the survey was carried out so as to oversample unemployed members of the work force. In this context the data have been weighted so that the unemployed are not overrepresented.)

[7] Because of the clear reference in several of these questions to "workers" and because of the importance which the working class as such assumes in the work of Marx, respondents have been divided into white- and blue-collar groups. Clearly, such a crude division does violence to

Figure 1

CLASS SELF-IDENTIFICATION



In Figure 1, the unshaded portion of each bar gives the proportion who responded "middle" or "working" to the open-ended question; the upper shaded portion shows the additional increment provided by answers to the forced-choice closed-ended question; the figure at the top of the bar is the total percentage of the group which chose that class designation in response either to the open or the closed-ended question. Only 4 per cent of the white-collar workers spontaneously placed themselves in the working class, while 69 per cent placed themselves in the middle class. Blue-collar workers were somewhat more likely to identify with the working class. Still, only 8 per cent made this spontaneous choice while 50 per cent chose the middle class. Considering responses to the close-ended follow-up question, the pattern changes somewhat: white-collar workers identified with the middle class by a margin of about two-to-one; blue-collar workers chose the working-class option by nearly as large a margin. Taking the responses to the two questions together, we find an overwhelming preference among white-collar workers, and a two-to-one preference among blue-collar workers, for middle-class identification.[8]

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the realities of the contemporary occupational world. In particular, this dichotomy does not take into account the similarities -- both in terms of objective position and in terms of attitudes -- between manual workers and members of the lower-white-collar proletariat. On this issue see Richard F. Hamilton, Class and Politics in the United States (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1972) and Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

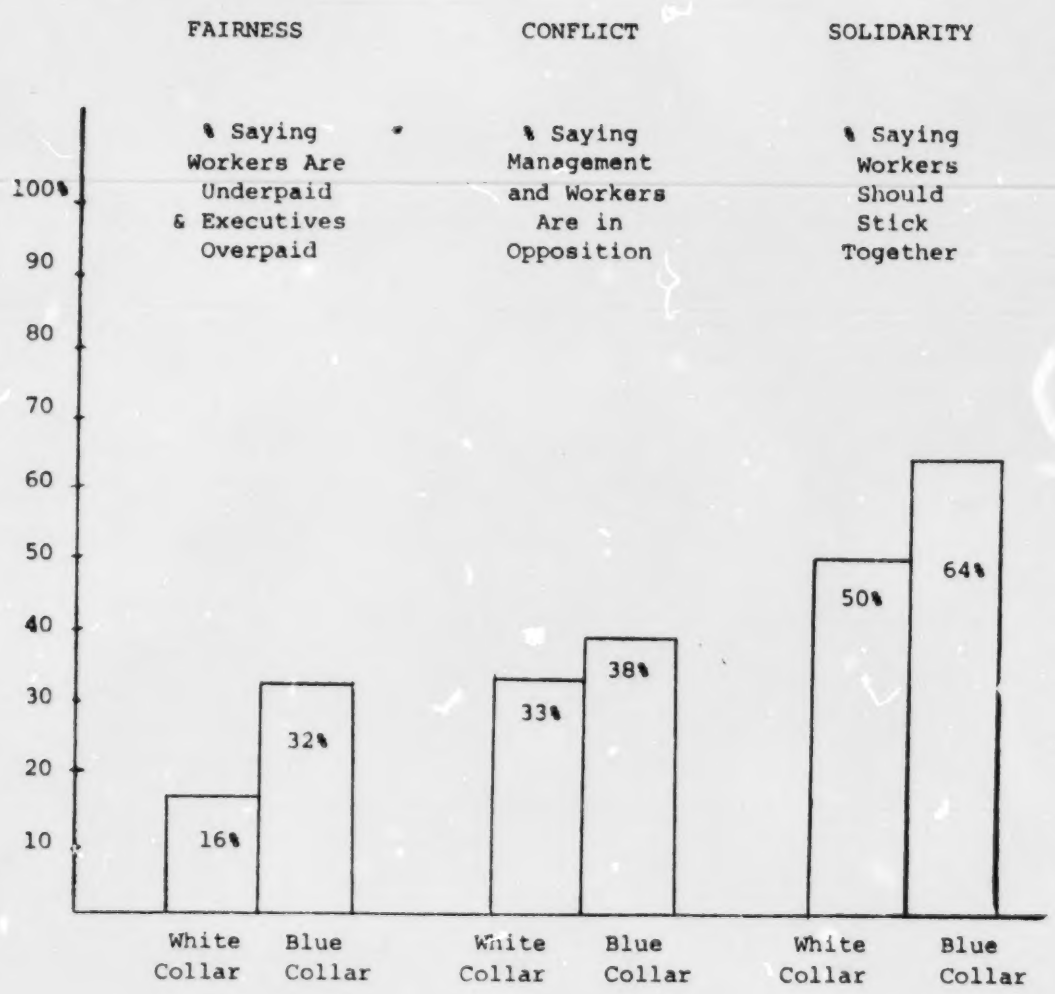
[8]David Butler and Donald Stokes present data which show that British respondents are much more likely to place themselves in the middle or working class -- as opposed to other miscellaneous categories -- when asked an open-ended class self-identification question. Furthermore, more than three-fourths of the manual workers to whom they spoke identified with the working class in response to a two-part open-and closed-ended question analogous to the one used here. [Political Change in Britain (2nd ed., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), pp. 68-73.] These data confirm the conclusion that the level of spontaneous working-class consciousness in the United States is very low.

Other measures of class consciousness: In addition to the questions about class self-identification, several other questions were asked in order to tap other dimensions of class consciousness. Respondents were queried about the fairness of economic rewards -- whether first factory workers and then business executives are paid too much, too little, or about the right amount; about class conflict -- whether the interests of workers and management are fundamentally in opposition or fundamentally the same; and about solidarity among workers -- whether workers in America would be better off if they stuck together or if they worked as individuals to get ahead on their own.

Figure 2 gives the proportions of the white- and blue-collar groups giving class-conscious replies to these items. On each of these dimensions -- fairness, conflict and solidarity -- blue-collar workers were more likely to give a class-conscious response: to say that workers are paid too little and executives too much; that the interests of workers and management are in oppostition; and that workers should stick together. The item about working-class solidarity elicits the most class-conscious replies from both occupational groups followed by those about conflict and fairness respectively. It is interesting to note that the sharpest difference between the occupational groups appears on the question about fairness, the smallest difference on the question about conflict. It is hardly surprising that blue-collar workers manifest greater class-consciousness than white-collar workers. Even though there is nothing inappropriate about a white-collar worker's responding that workers are paid too little and executives too much, that there is fundamental conflict between the classes or that workers should stick together, it is difficult to suggest an interpretation of what it means for a white-collar worker to identify

Figure 2

ADDITIONAL CLASS-CONSCIOUSNESS MEASURES



with the working class or, for that matter, what would be meant by working-class consciousness on the part of white-collar workers.

It is interesting to note in passing the relationships among the individual class consciousness items. Although the various aspects of class consciousness have been discussed as separate dimensions it seems reasonable to expect them to form a coherent belief system. For blue-collar workers, though not for white-collar workers, there are reasonably strong relationships between identifying with the working class and the other dimensions of class conflict. (For blue-collar workers, average gamma = .43). However, when it comes to the other dimensions of class consciousness, the relationships for blue-collar workers among the items are quite unimpressive, albeit they are all in the expected direction. (For blue-collar workers, average gamma = .13).[9] The relative weakness of the relationships among these class consciousness items becomes even clearer when the coefficients are compared with those for another set of three substantively related items having to do with the nature of opportunities for success in America. (For blue-collar workers, the average gamma for these American Dream items = .45). Both because these measures are substantively related and because the belief systems of ordinary citizens have been characterized by considerable structural

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[9]The gammas for these relationships are as follows. (The upper portion of the table gives the data for blue-collar workers, the lower portion for white-collar workers.)

	Identity	Fairness	Conflict	Solidarity	
Identity	X	.51	.39	.39	Blue-collar
Fairness	.37	X	.15	.10	workers
Conflict	.46	.30	X	.14	
Solidarity	-.21	.44	.09	X	

White-collar workers

coherence in recent years,[10] it is not obvious why the relationships among various measures exhibit so little coherence.

Who Has It?

So far, we have located whatever class consciousness exists where one would expect to find it -- among blue-collar workers -- but we have not found very much of it. In order to understand more fully why there is so little, it seems germane to probe further the circumstances which are commonly thought to nurture -- or to inhibit -- its development. Using the multiple measures of class consciousness which have been presented, four hypotheses will be examined. First we will consider the Marxian proposition that class consciousness emerges in settings which bring workers into contact with one another. Then we will consider commonly accepted explanations of the absence of class consciousness in contemporary America: that racial divisions in the working class prevent American workers from recognizing their common interests; that the individualism associated with the Horatio Alger ethic is hostile to the development of class solidarity; that the affluence of postindustrial society blurs class distinctions and, therefore, depresses consciousness.

Unionization, Factories and Class Consciousness: Marx made clear that individual workers in isolation from one another would be unlikely to achieve "true" consciousness; however, when concentrated together in factories they would have the opportunity to communicate with one another and to combine into associations. Thus, class consciousness would be

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10 On this point, see Norman H. Nie with Kristi Andersen, "Mass Belief Systems Revisited," Journal of Politics, XXXVI (August, 1974), 540-87.

fostered where workers have an opportunity to interact. On this basis it seems reasonable to expect both factory workers -- as opposed to those who pursue manual work in non-factory settings like beauty shops, restaurants or laundries -- and union members to be especially likely to be class conscious. Special emphasis is placed upon unionization as a consciousness-raising mechanism because, in the absence of a socialist or social democratic party, there are few institutions in American society which are as explicitly concerned with representing workers' needs as unions are.

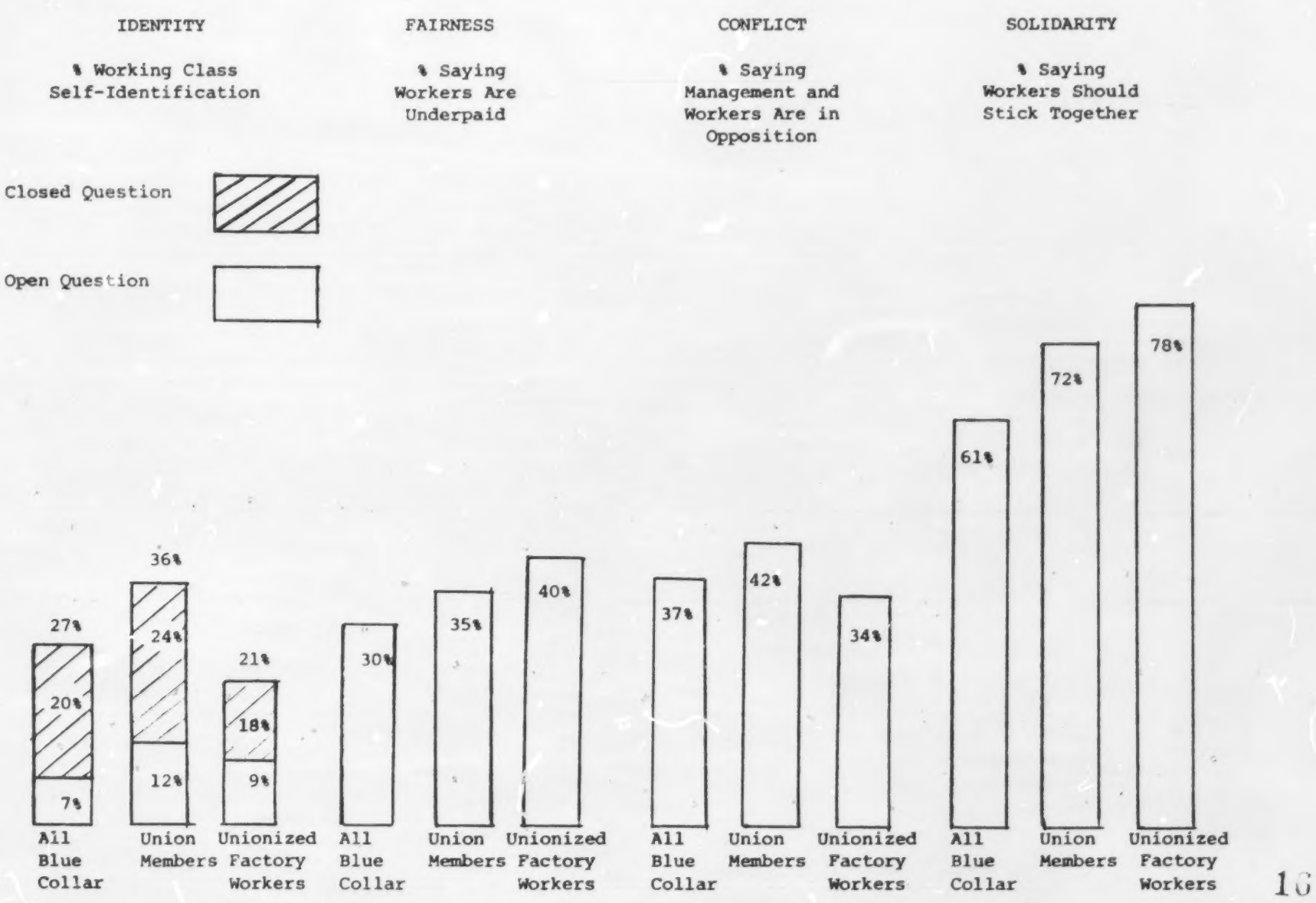
The data in Figure 3 show the effects upon class consciousness of associating with other workers in unions and in factory settings. In each case the comparison is first between all blue-collar workers and all blue-collar union members and then between these two groups and blue-collar union members who work in factories, the group which would be expected to exhibit the highest level of consciousness. In each case, union members are more class conscious than blue-collar workers as a whole. Interestingly,it is the difference in terms of solidarity -- believing that workers should stick together if they wish to get ahead -- which is largest. On the other dimensions the differences are relatively small and of consistent magnitude. It is interesting that unionization seems to increase the understanding of the efficacy of collective activity but to be less effective in creating the sense of the class system against which such collective activity would be taken. In particular, it is interesting to note that, even though union members are relatively more likely to give a spontaneous working-class identification, the number of such identifiers among union members is a mere 12 per cent.

If the differences associated with union membership are consistent,

Figure 3

Class Consciousness by Union Membership and Factory Work Setting

(Blue Collar Workers Only)



although not overwhelmingly large, effects of working in a factory setting are not even consistent. Unionized blue-collar factory workers, who might be predicted to be the most class-conscious group, are more likely to see the existing distribution of rewards as unfair and to believe that workers should stick together, but less likely to identify with the working class and to see conflict between the classes. Thus, the hypothesis that factory settings are conducive to the development of class consciousness cannot be confirmed -- at least in the contemporary United States.

Race and Class Consciousness: Three themes contained in the common wisdom about the working class in contemporary America offer answers to the question "Why so little class consciousness?" Let us now turn to a consideration of the first of those themes, the degree to which race consciousness among black workers acts as a barrier to class solidarity.

At least since Engels, observers of American society have remarked upon the degree to which ethnic diversity divides the working class and renders more difficult the emergence of the politics of economic conflict:

> American conditions involve very great and peculiar difficulties for a steady development of a workers' party ... immigration, which divides the workers into two groups: the native-born and the foreigners, and the latter in turn into (1) the Irish, (2) the Germans, (3) the many small groups, each of which understands only itself: Czechs, Poles, Italians, Scandinavians, etc. And then the Negroes. To form a single party out of these requires unusually powerful incentives.[11]

Such a view seems to make intuitive sense given the prominence of racial conflict in American history and contemporary politics. The point is

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[11] Letter to Friedrich A. Sorge in Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, ed. by Lewis S. Feuer, Anchor Books, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1959), p. 458.

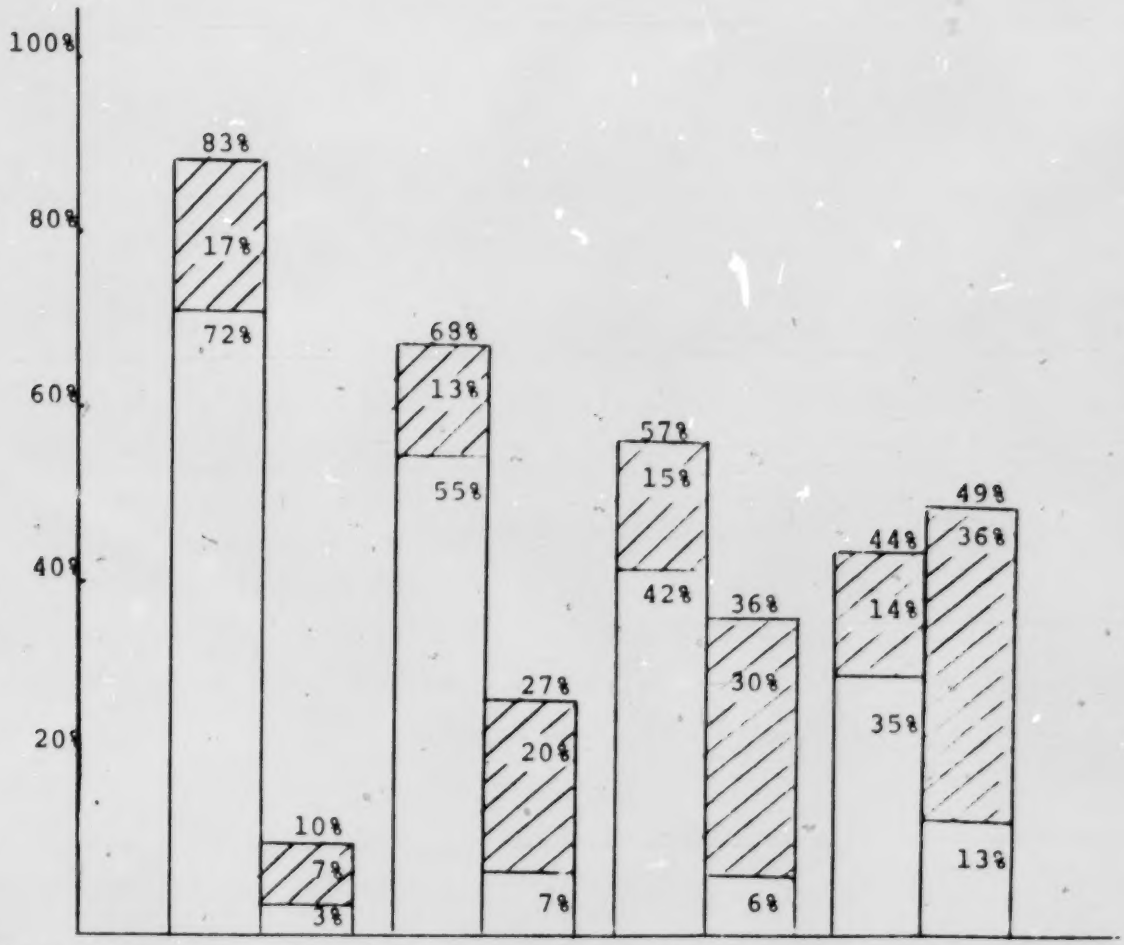
frequently made that those most directly threatened by thrusts for equality on the part of blacks are the whites who are closest to them in economic status: whites whose craft-union training programs have been targeted for inclusion of minority trainees, whose neighborhoods have been selected for public housing sites, or whose inner-city schools have been incorporated into busing plans. Those who would be expected to be allies in a politics of economics continue to be, as they have often been in the past, frequent antagonists in a politics of social and cultural issues. Clearly, survey data cannot begin to speak to the overall issue of the degree to which racial conflict dampens worker solidarity. Still we can focus on a narrower aspect of the question, whether race consciousness on the part of blacks undermines class consciousness.

We can begin by inquiring whether blacks manifest the kind of limited class consciousness which seemed to be so rare within the American working class as a whole. Figure 4 presents data on the class self-identifications of black and white blue-collar and white-collar workers. In each of the occupational categories blacks are less likely than their white counterparts to have assigned themselves spontaneously either to the middle or to the working class. In addition, blacks are somewhat less likely than their white counterparts to place themselves in the middle class and slightly more likely than the parallel white group to place themselves in the working class in response to the open-ended question. What is striking about the pattern of responses, however, is not the differences between whites and blacks, but the similarities. Even among blue-collar blacks only a few respondents spontaneously identify with the working-class.

Clear differences between the races do appear in the responses to the closed-ended follow-up question on class identification. Blacks were more likely than whites to have chosen a working-class identification when

Figure 4

Class Self-Identification by Race and Occupation



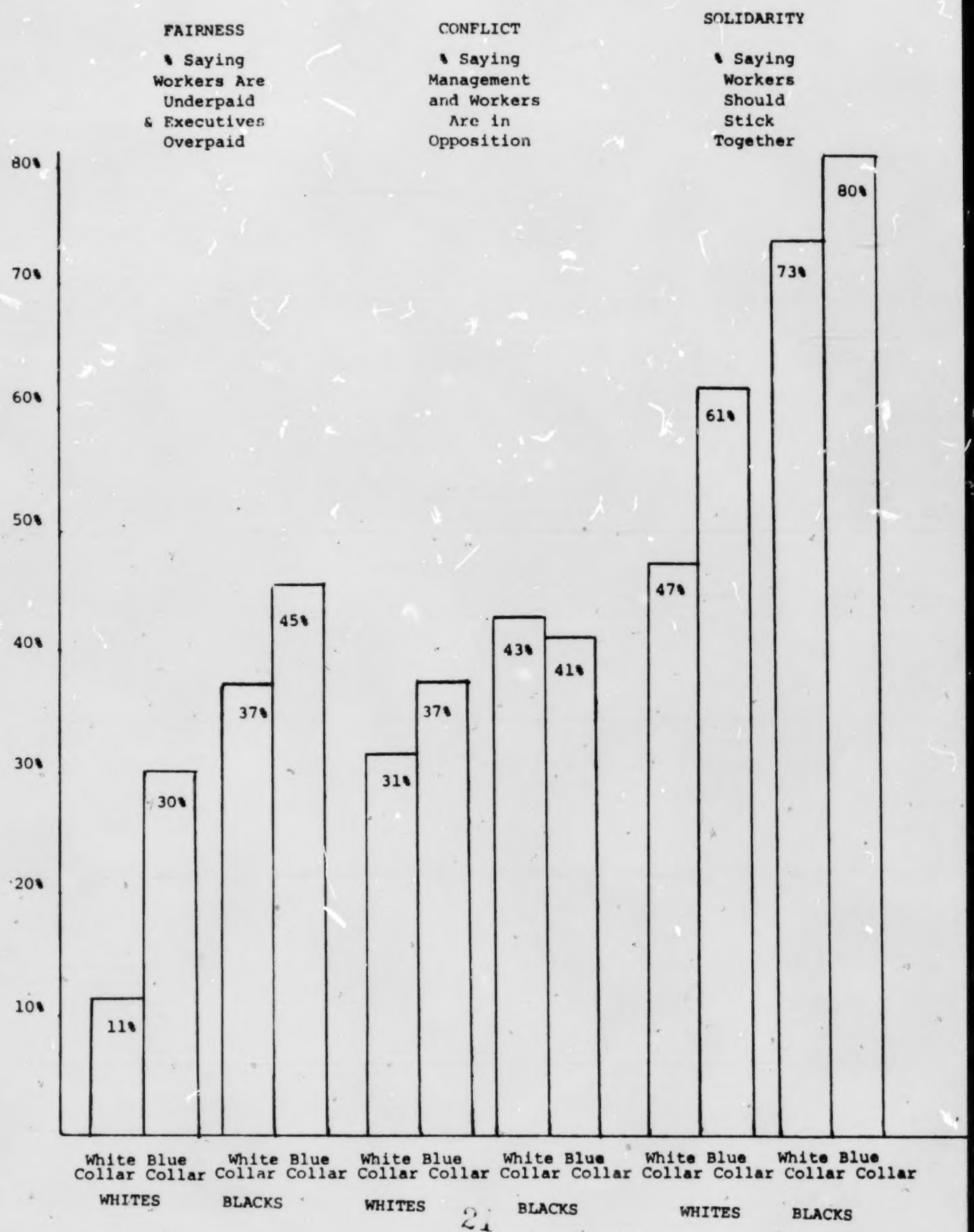
presented with a forced choice between middle- and working-class identification. Among blue-collar workers of both races, a majority identified with the working class when confronted with the dual alternatives. However, blue-collar blacks were relatively more likely to have chosen working-class identification than blue collar whites. It is interesting that even white-collar blacks chose a working-class identification on the follow-up question by a two-to-one majority, while white-collar workers among whites, not surprisingly, chose a middle-class identification by the same ratio. Still, the obvious interpretation of the combined responses is that Americans identify with the middle class. Only in one group, blue-collar blacks, is there a plurality of working-class identifiers. However, even then, those who choose working-class identification -- still a minority -- do so largely in response to the forced-choice follow-up question.

As shown in Figure 5, there are clear differences between blacks and whites in terms of their responses to our other class-consciousness measures. In each case, each of the black occupational groups is more likely to give a class-conscious response than is either of the white occupational groups: to believe that the distribution of economic rewards in America is unfair, to see conflict between the interests of workers and management, and to believe that workers should stick together. It is interesting to note that, in each case, there is less difference in attitude between the occupational groups among blacks than among whites.

However, the relative class consciousness that we have discovered among blacks would in essence be meaningless if it were submerged in an even stronger sense of black consciousness. On this basis it seems reasonable

Figure 5

Class Consciousness by Race and Occupational Level



to inquire if blacks -- who perceive more class conflict and subscribe to more class solidarity than whites -- are more likely to perceive race than class solidarity. Figure 6, in which blacks' responses to our questions about class conflict and class solidarity are compared with their responses to analogous questions about race conflict and solidarity, shows that blacks are more likely to give class-conscious than race-conscious responses: 35 per cent indicate that the interests of blacks and whites are in opposition while 45 per cent said that the interests of workers and management are in opposition; 69 per cent indicated that blacks should stick together while 75 per cent said that workers should stick together.[12]

Furthermore, race consciousness does not seem to dampen class consciousness among blacks. Rather it seems to enhance it slightly. As shown in Table 1, 47 per cent of blacks who see conflict between the interests of blacks and whites, but only 40 per cent of those who do not, also see opposition between the classes. Eighty-six per cent of blacks who say that blacks should stick together, as opposed to 58 per cent of those who feel that blacks should struggle on their own, feel that workers should stick

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[12] Precisely analogous questions make somewhat less sense for the two other aspects of consciousness which have been specified, identity and fairness. Presumably, the question which would parallel in wording the open-ended item used to measure class self-identification would be something like "What race do you consider yourself?" Of course, such a question was indeed posed in the Metropolitan Work Force Survey, but the answers were not considered to be a measure of "racial self-identification." That responses to the question about class would be construed as an indicator of subjective identification while answers to the question about race would be seen as a matter of objective reality is itself significant. Presumably, the way to ask parallel questions about class and racial identity is to ask how close the respondent feels to members of various groups -- including blacks, whites, the working class and the middle class. This was the strategy adopted in the 1976 Election Survey conducted by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan.

With reference to the dimension of fairness, a question was posed about

Figure 6

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS
(Black Respondents Only)

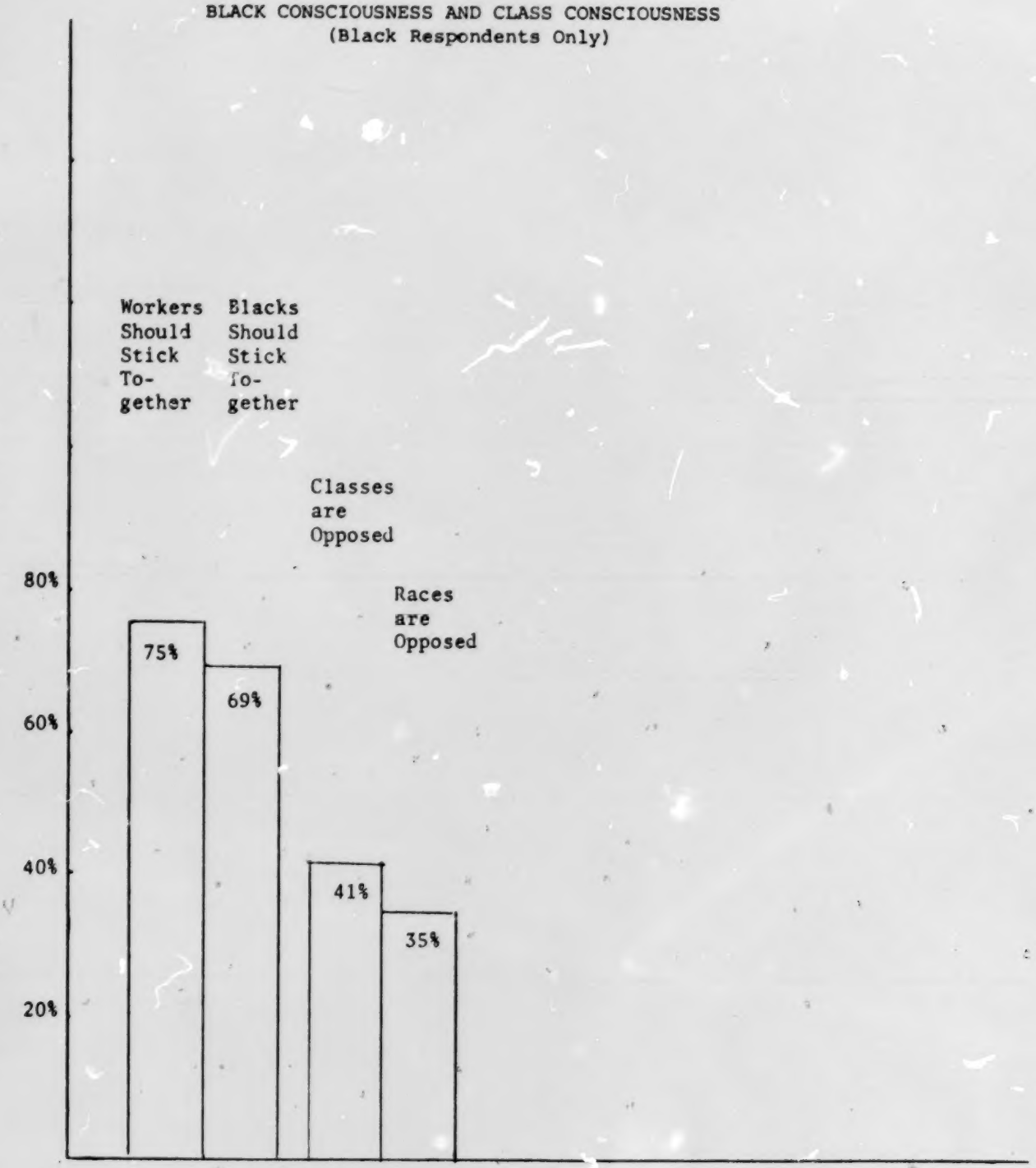

Table 1

Race Consciousness by Class Consciousness among Blacks

Per cent seeing opposition between the Classes:	
Among those who see opposition between the races	47%
Among those who see no opposition between the races	40%
Per cent saying workers should stick together:	
Among those who say blacks should stick together	86%
Among those who say blacks should get ahead on their own	58%

together. Thus, class-conscious views are more common among the race-conscious -- not less.

These issues were pursued further in a series of longer follow-up interviews which were conducted with a small sample of the respondents who were originally contacted in the telephone survey.[13] Two themes emerge clearly from the small number of follow-up interviews with blacks. The first is that blacks are, on the whole, more oriented to group solidarity than

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the fairness of society's treatment of blacks and whites. However, it was sufficiently different, both in content and in format, from the questions about fair pay for workers and executives that comparison of the marginals on the items is impossible. Still, the responses to the question about race fairness are sufficiently instructive to warrant attention.

Respondents were asked who has a better chance to get the good jobs -- blacks, whites or is there no difference. Those who saw a difference were then asked if they considered that difference to be fair. As shown in the data presented below, blacks felt there to be considerably more unfairness with respect to job opportunities for whites and blacks than blue-collar workers of either race perceived with respect to the fairness of pay. Furthermore, there is a much more substantial difference between blacks and whites on this issue than there was between blue-collar and white-collar workers on issues involving class or between blacks and whites on issues involving class.

Fairness of Blacks and Whites Chances to Get the Good Jobs

	Whites	Blacks
Blacks have a better chance and it's unfair	21%	0%
Whites have a better chance and it's unfair	42	75
No difference	32	24
Blacks have a better chance and it's fair	2	0
Whites have a better chance and it's fair	3	1
	100%	100%

[13] The utterly unsystematic sample for the follow-up interviews included sixty respondents -- all of whom were jobless at the time of the original telephone interviews and nineteen of whom were black. It is only fair to caution against lending too much credence to inferences drawn from such a small and unsystematic sample.

whites. This, however, merely confirms what we learned in Figure 6. What is more interesting is that blacks on the whole do not eschew cooperation with whites in pursuit of class-related economic goals. Black respondents in the follow-up interviews were asked whether black workers should form their own separate organizations to solve their common problems or whether they should work together with workers of other races. Only one of the sixteen black respondents who answered the question said that blacks should not work with whites. The separatist approach of this particular respondent, a twenty-year-old black factory worker, was unambiguous. "You're marching against the 'man' so why should you march with them." The rest of the black respondents opposed demonstrations or marches on economic issues that were organized for blacks only. "We all need the same things so we should all work together," as a black plumber put it.

Several respondents were quite canny in differentiating the sorts of collective goals shared by those with common economic interests, whether those interests come by virtue of class or unemployment status, from the civil rights goals which unite blacks -- and for which many of the blacks indicated that black workers must fight alone, without the aid of sympathetic whites. "If you are fighting for equal rights or equal employment for blacks," a black telephone operator told us, "you should march on your own. But for rights for workers in general, you march with everyone else."

Blacks' willingness to cooperate with whites in pursuit of economic goals was often expressed in terms of collective goals for blacks; that is, many blacks expressed the view that, because whites hold all the power, the only way for blacks to get ahead is to work with whites who share

their economic interests. "If we tried it by ourselves they wouldn't listen." Thus, in a sense, class solidarity is embraced as the instrumentality for achieving racial goals.

In the course of this brief empirical exploration we have seen that black workers are considerably more class conscious than are white workers, a class consciousness which does not seem to enter into competition with their sense of race consciousness. However striking these findings might be, they must not be lent too much weight. The tendency of blacks to see more class than race conflict and to subscribe more to class than racial solidarity is indeed surprising; however, the data should not be interpreted as showing that class identity supercedes racial identity for blacks or that black consciousness is not a salient political force. At best, they show that, it is not an insuperable obstacle to class action on the part of blacks.

Clearly, the data presented are insufficient to contradict a hypothesis as apparently congruent with the American experience from the no-nothings through George Wallace as the hypothesis that working class politics has been impeded by ethnic divisions among those who share economic interests. First of all, survey data can go only so far in helping to understand the unfolding of political events. The chasm dividing the opinions expressed in a survey like ours and the actions of people on a picket line outside a high school in South Boston or a housing project in Forest Hills is a deep one. What is equally important, the attitudes of the black minority are probably less important than those of the white majority. No matter that blacks express willingness to unite with working-class whites or that race consciousness does not envelope class consciousness among black workers if whites are resistant to such cooperation or unconvinced

of its necessity. In a sense, the attitudes of blacks are irrelevant; it is the attitudes of the white majority which are crucial.

The American Dream and Class Consciousness: Observers of American society and politics have long noted the special nature of the democratic order in America and sought the key to explain it. Among the factors most frequently cited is a distinctive belief -- based upon a strong sense of individualism and a commitment to the equality of all men -- that the American is born into no bounded or defined place in the social hierarchy and, thus, that the opportunities for success for the able and ambitious are virtually unlimited.

The belief in individual opportunity for success -- what is called the American Dream -- is often said to have inhibited the emergence of a collective working class consciousness.[14] It seems eminently sensible to posit links between commitment to individualistic equality of opportunity and limited class consciousness, for the two suggest very different versions of how American society works and how one ought to cope with it. According to the American Dream, American society is essentially fair: the unequal distribution of rewards is a function of the fact that some people work harder and are more talented than others and are, therefore, able to advance; therefore, the worker who wishes to improve his lot should work hard on his own. According to a class conscious view, on the other hand, the division of social rewards is unfair, based on position in the economic order rather than any measure of merit or industry; therefore, the worker who wishes to increase his share of those

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[14] One of the earliest and most provocative versions of this theory is contained in Leon Samson's Toward a United Front (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935), Chap. 1.

rewards should join with other workers and act collectively to change an unjust system. Although this relationship between belief in the American Dream and the absence of class consciousness has been often hypothesized, and sometimes taken for granted, it has rarely if ever been submitted to empirical test.[15]

Considering this logic -- that an individualistic vision of advancement is incompatible with a class-conscious view of the way society divides its rewards — we would be led to have no particular expectations about class self-identification. There would seem to be no particular conflict between identifying with the working class and believing in the American Dream. One could easily call himself a worker and believe that there is plenty of opportunity for success and that those opportunities are fairly distributed; on the other hand, there is no reason why someone who thinks of himself as middle class must be optimistic about those opportunities. Thus, there is no particular reason to expect that those who believe in the American Dream would be especially unlikely to identify with the working class.

The data presented in Figure 7 confirm this expectation. Among blue-collar workers, there is relatively little difference in frequency of working-class identification between those who believe there is little

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[15]Respondents were asked several questions about their belief in the American Dream, among them: whether the child of a factory worker a good chance, some chance, a slight chance or no chance at all to become a business executive or professional; whether the worker's child has about the same chance, somewhat less, or much less chance to get ahead than the child of a business executive and, if the chances were perceived different, whether or not the difference was seen to be fair. By and large, they were quite sanguine about the amount of opportunity for success available: 71 per cent indicated that a worker's child has at least some chance to get ahead. They were more cynical about the equal distribution of those chances for success: 58 per cent saw differences between the chances available to workers' and executives' children and considered those differences to be unfair.

openness for advancement on the part of the child of a factory worker or who believe the opportunities are unfair and those who take a more sanguine view of the opportunity structure in America. Those who believe that the chances for a child of a factory worker are good or that the allocation of chances is fair between a factory worker and an executive child are actually very slightly more likely to consider themselves working class than are those who believe that working class child has no chance or that the distribution of chances across classes is unfair.

It is on the other measures of class consciousness that a relationship would be expected between belief in the American Dream and the absence of class consciousness, for it is the other measures which tap the respondents' sense of how the world works, as opposed to his sense of himself. As shown in Figure 8, there is such a relationship. The top set of graphs shows the relationship between views on how much opportunity for advancement a factory worker's child has and the likelihood of choosing the "class conscious" answer to the several measures of class consciousness: belief that workers are unfairly rewarded; belief in conflict between the interests of management and workers; and belief that workers must stick together. The bottom set of graphs shows the relationship between belief in the fairness of opportunities in America and the choice of a class conscious response. As one can see, almost all the relationships are positive both for white-collar and for blue-collar workers. Though belief in the American Dream was unrelated to class self-identification, it clearly does have some relationship to other measures of class consciousness. Interestingly enough, the relationships are positive for both blue-collar and white-collar workers and, though there is variation from question to question, of similar magnitude for the two groups. The argument that belief in the American

Figure 7

Does Belief in the American Dream Depress Class Consciousness?
(Blue Collar Workers Only)

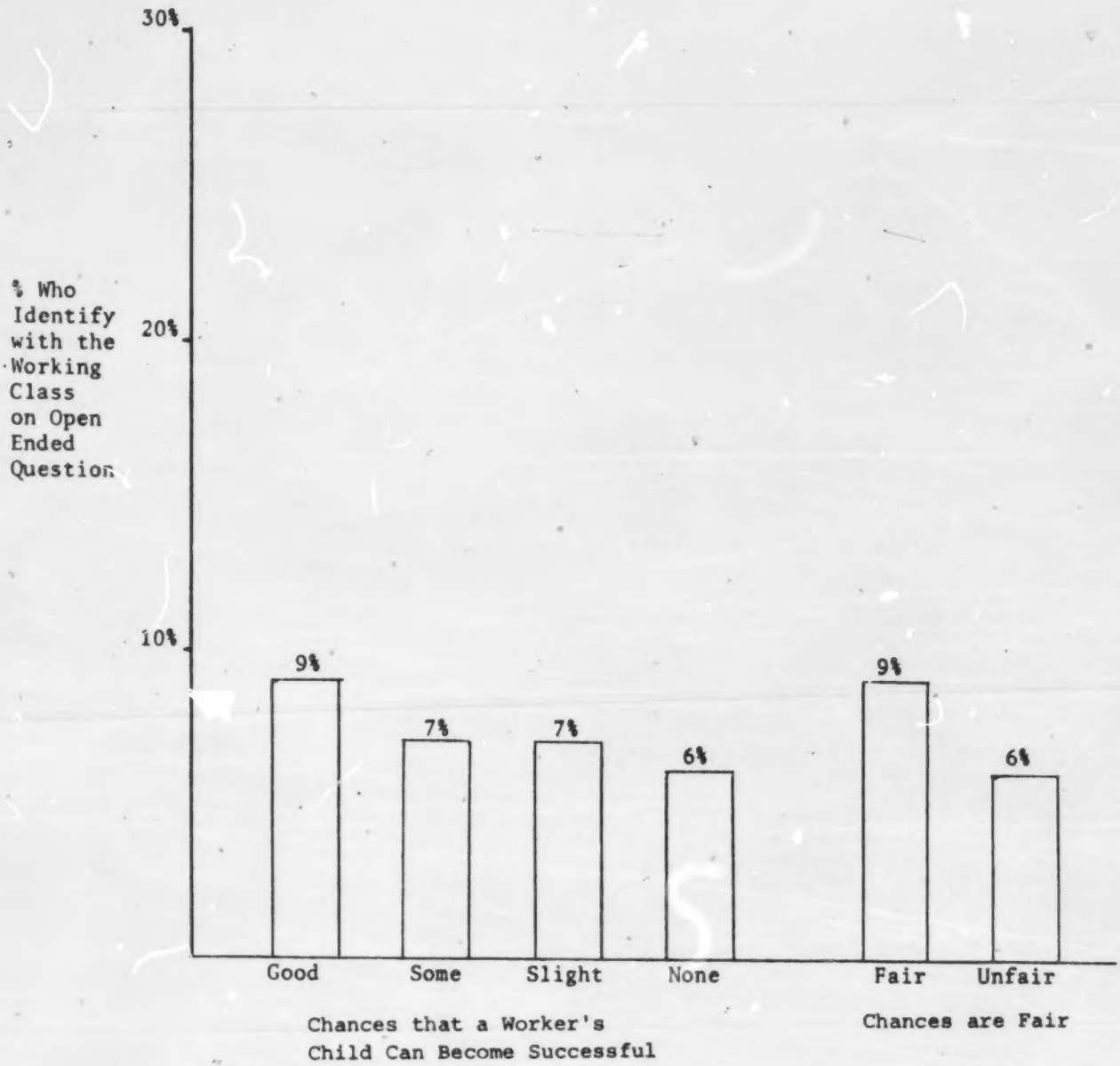
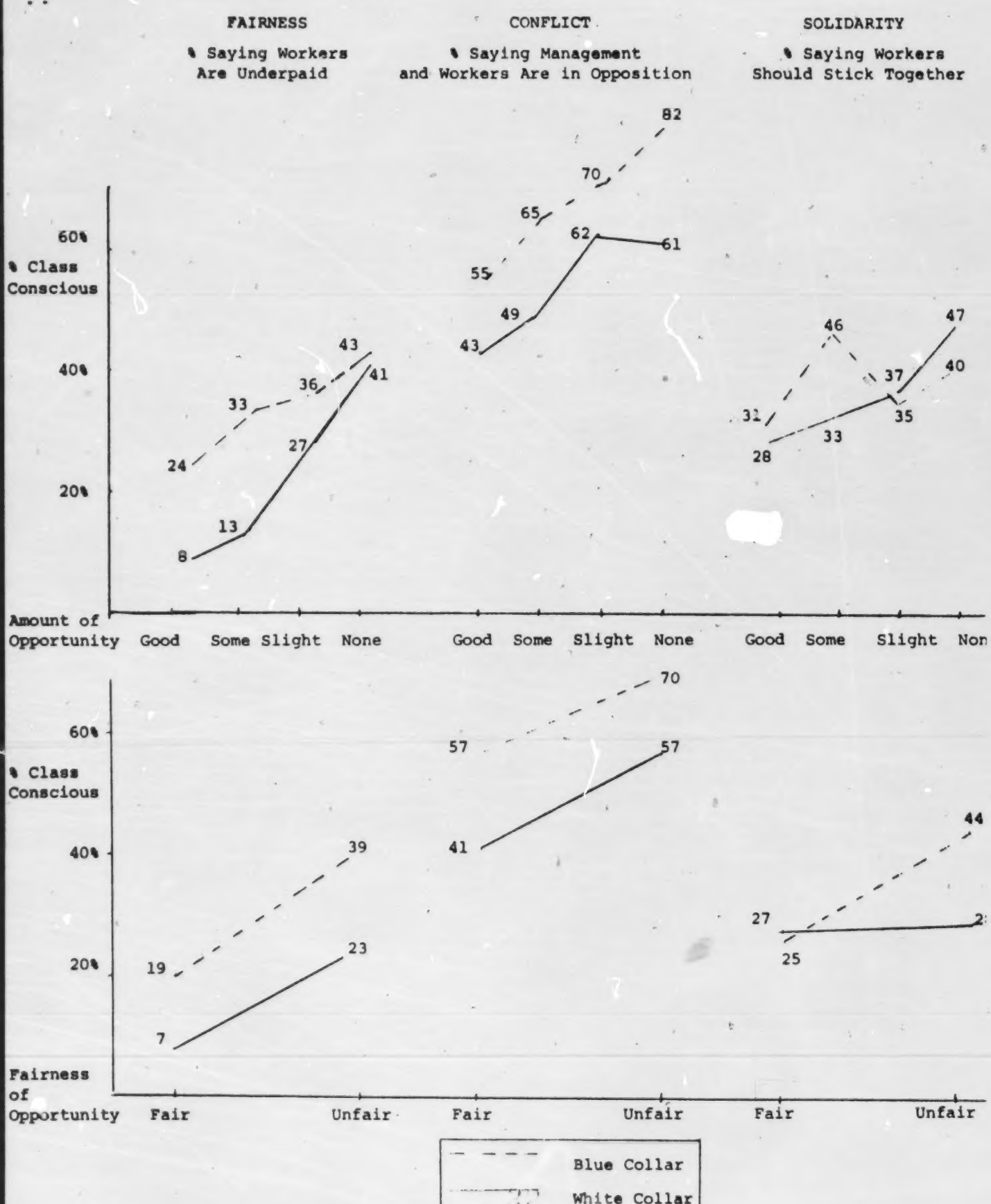


Figure 8


FAIRNESS
% Saying Workers Are Underpaid
CONFLICT
% Saying Management and Workers Are in Opposition
SOLIDARITY
% Saying Workers Should Stick Together
60%
40%
20%
% Class Conscious
24
33
36
43
8
13
27
41
43
49
55
65
70
82
62
61
31
46
37
47
28
33
35
40
Amount of Opportunity
Good
Some
Slight
None
Good
Some
Slight
None
Good
Some
Slight
Non
60%
40%
20%
% Class Conscious
19
39
7
23
57
70
41
57
27
25
44
Fairness of Opportunity
Fair
Unfair
Fair
Unfair
Fair
Unfair
Blue Collar
White Collar

Dream would dampen down class consciousness is, of course, pitched in terms of the impact of these beliefs on consciousness among those who objectively would fall within the working class -- presumably blue-collar workers. In fact, the relationship holds for both groups. Thus, we have given some empirical confirmation to one of the bits of common wisdom which "everybody knows" about American politics, that the prevailing individualism of the American Dream has served to mute class consciousness.

Class Consciousness in a Post-Industrial Age: An often heard -- and as frequently disputed -- generalization about contemporary American politics is that class politics is of diminished salience in a post-industrial society. In an era of technological development, a service-oriented economy, and pervasive affluence, class lines are said to have become less distinct and class conflicts are said to become eclipsed by disputes over matters of style, morals and way-of-life. As an abstract interpretation of the current direction of American society, this analysis is not without its critics. At a more concrete level the evidence is somewhat mixed; however, those who study public opinion and voting have found, by and large, a diminution over time in the relationship between social class and expressed political preferences.[16]

Along these lines, it seems reasonable to inquire whether it was always thus, or whether the level of class consciousness was not perhaps higher in the past. Although cross-sectional data do not permit distinctions

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16 See, for example, Richard E. Dawson, Public Opinion and Contemporary Disarray (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973), chap. 4; Gerald Pomper, Voters' Choice (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1975), chap. 3; Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, The Changing American Voter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), chaps. 13-14; Everett Carll Ladd, Jr., with Charles D. Hadley, Transformations of the American Party System (2nd ed. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978).

between generational and life-cycle effects, we can make a preliminary stab by considering the relationship between age and class consciousness. One would expect that the small group of people in the sample who came of age politically during the Depression of the thirties -- a period when American politics was characterized by relatively higher levels of class antagonisms -- would have a relatively stronger sense of class consciousness. As shown in Figure 9, which gives the percentage of the blue-collar workers in various age groups who identified with the working class in response to our open- and closed-ended questions, there is a fairly clear relationship between age and the propensity to identify with the working class. Very, very few of the younger blue-collar workers identify spontaneously with the working class. Although the proportion spontaneously identifying with the working class reaches only 19 per cent in the oldest group, this is still a substantially higher proportion than in any of the other age groups. As shown in Figure 10, however, this pattern does not hold for our other measures of class consciousness. In no case is there anything resembling a linear relationship, and in no case the oldest group relatively the most class conscious.

It is possible to make over-time comparisons using data from a study conducted in 1939 by Roper Poll for Fortune Magazine about two of our measures, class self-identification and perception of conflict between the classes. These data make possible informed speculation about how the level of class consciousness has changed since the Depression.[17]

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[17]For a fuller analysis of these data, including an explanation of the difficulties involved in using them and the rationale for looking at whites only, see Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Unemployment, Class Consciousness and Radical Politics," Journal of Politics 39 (May, 1977), 291-323.

Figure 9

Working Class Identification by Age (Blue Collar Only)

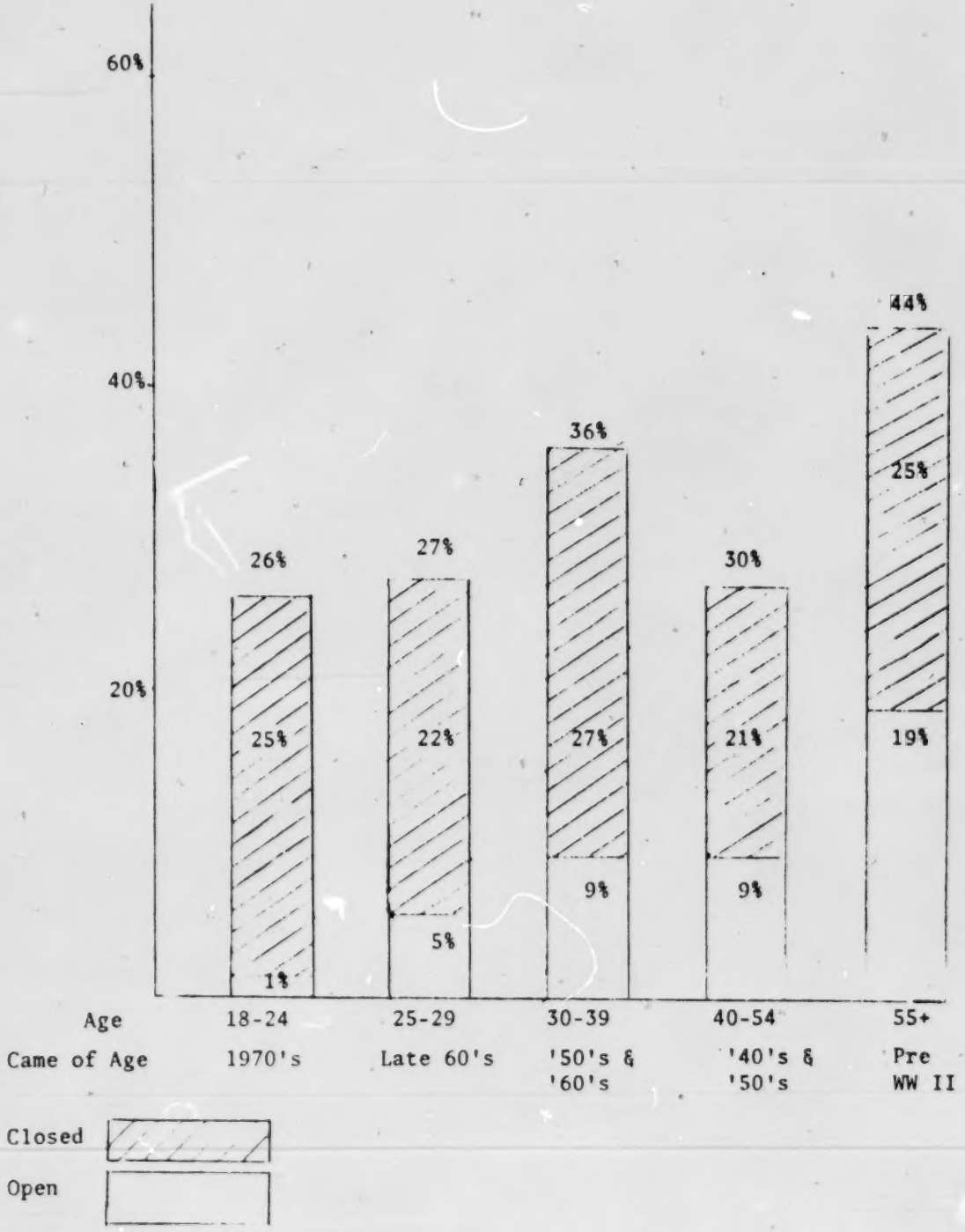
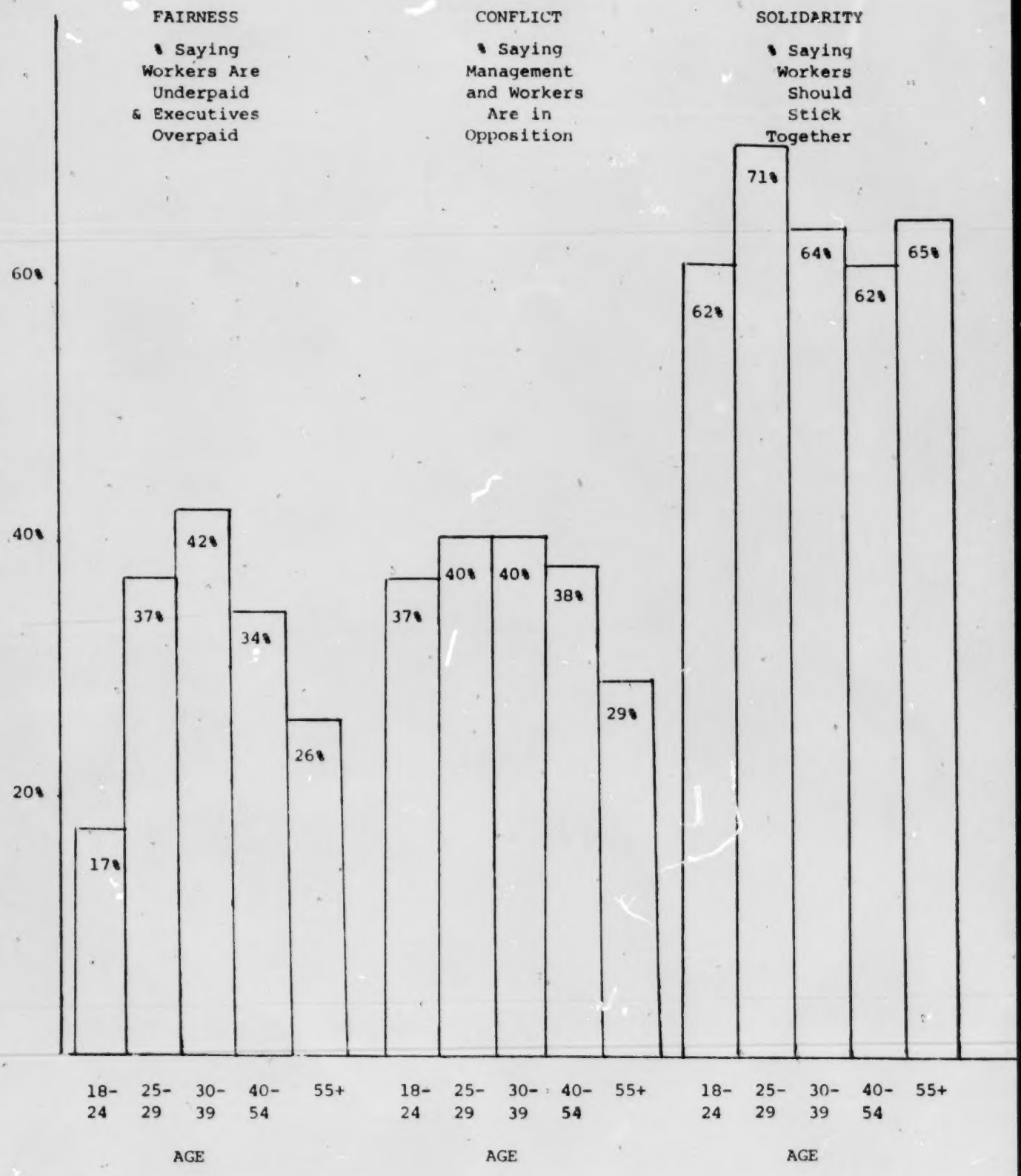


Figure 10

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS BY AGE
(Blue Collar Only)



Recently there has been a certain amount of debate among social scientists about whether there has been an actual decline in the number of working-class identifiers or whether the alleged decline is a function of differences in sampling and question-wording.[18] The debate centers around responses to closed-ended class self-identification items. Although it is impossible to settle this debate definitively, the responses to the open-ended question asked in 1976 -- a replication of the question used by Roper in 1939 -- can be used to supplement available figures. Table 2, which gives the responses for the white, non-farm work force for 1939 and 1976, shows some significant changes over the past several decades. As compared with 1976, there were more working-class identifiers and more people who did not answer at all and fewer middle-class and miscellaneous replies in 1939. It is important to note that, even then, a majority of the respondents were spontaneous middle-class identifiers and only 16 per cent were spontaneous working-class identifiers.

Because the white non-farm work force has changed substantially in composition in the years since 1939, it seems appropriate to examine class self-identification within various occupational levels. In Figure 11, upper-white-collar, lower-white-collar, and wage workers are compared in terms of their class self-identifications.[19] There was less difference among

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[18]See Richard F. Hamilton, "The Marginal Middle Class: A Reconsideration" American Sociological Review, XXXI (April, 1966), 192-199; Charles W. Tucker "On Working Class Identification" and Hamilton, "Reply to Tucker," American Sociological Review, XXXI (December, 1966), 855-856. E. M. Schreiber and G. T. Nygrun "Subjective Social Class in America," Social Forces, XLVIII (March, 1970), 348-356, attempt to reconcile the various positions of these and other authors. See also, Richard T. Morris and Vincent Jeffries, "Class Consciousness: Forget It!" Sociology and Social Research, LIV (April, 1970), 192-199.

[19]The 1939 data do not permit us to distinguish between upper-blue-collar

Table 2

Open Ended Class Self-Identification:
1939 and 1976

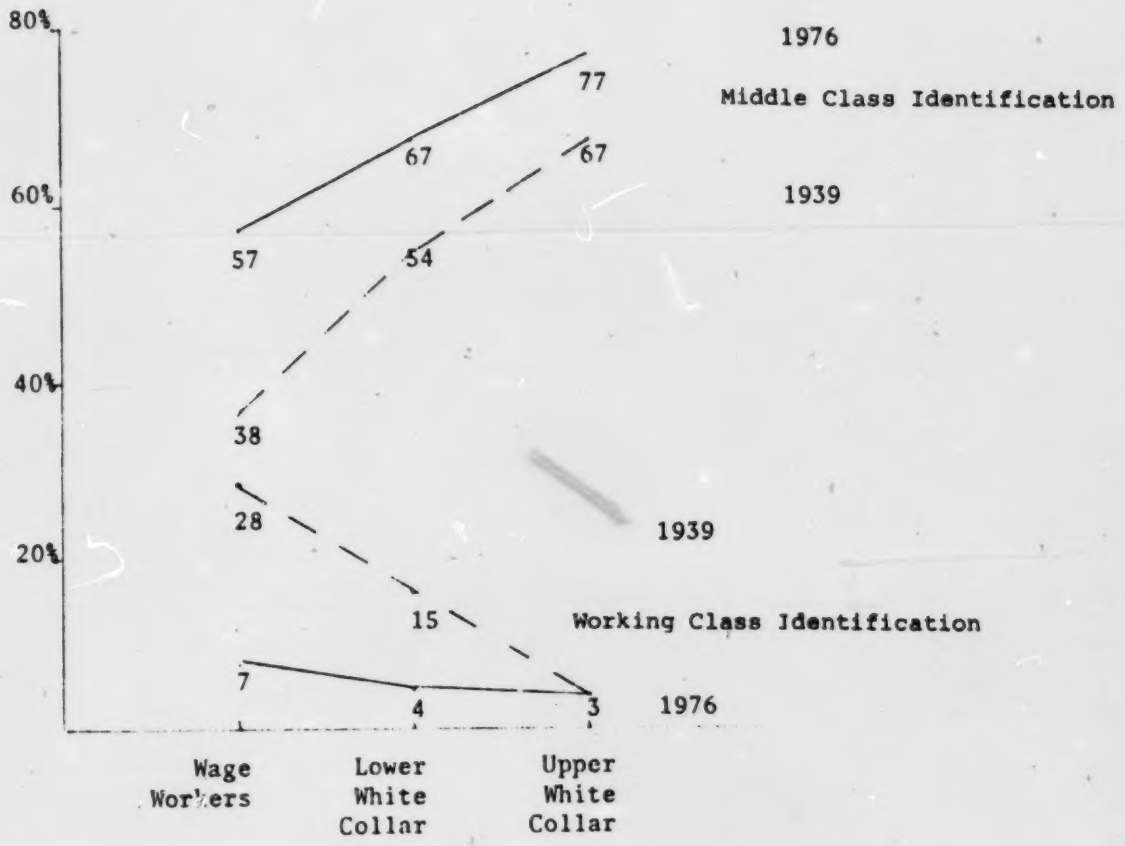
(Whites Only)

Class Identification	1939	1976
Upper or Middle	51%	67%
Working	16%	4%
Miscellaneous	12%	20%
No Answer	21%	9%
	100%	100%
	(2048)	(3319)

Figure 11

Open-Ended Class Self-Identification by Occupational Level: 1939 and 1976 -

(Whites Only)



the occupational groups in 1976 than 1939. Virtually no one, regardless of occupational level, identified with the working class in 1976. Although there is some relationship between occupational level and the likelihood of identifying as middle class in 1976, the relationship is not as strong as it was in 1939 when the number of middle-class identifiers rose more rapidly -- and the number of working class identifiers fell correspondingly -- with movement up the occupational ladder. It is interesting to note, furthermore, that in 1976 the beliefs of all occupational groups more or less approximated those of the upper-white-collar group in 1939: at that time in the highest occupational group, 3 per cent spontaneously identified with the working class and 67 per cent with the middle class, figures which approximate the results across all class levels in 1976.

In contrast to the change in the number of working-class identifiers since 1939, there is very little change over the period in the overall perception of conflict between the classes. That within itself is interesting in that the thirties were a period of considerable conflict between labor and management and a time when the rhetoric of class conflict was more frequently heard than in the seventies. However, as shown in Figure 12, there has been a change in the relationship between occupational level and perception of class conflict, a change analogous to that found for the relationship between class self-identification and occupational level. In 1939 twice as many wage workers as upper-white-collar workers gave class-conscious responses to the item about class conflict; in 1976 the figures for the two groups were virtually the same. In the case of class

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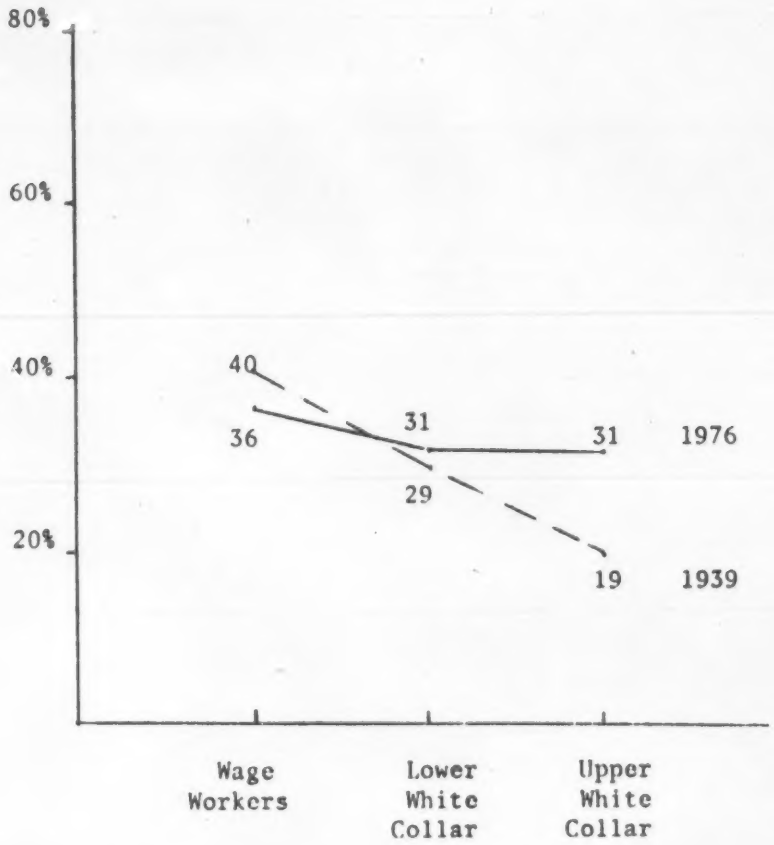
and lower-blue-collar workers much less to construct sophisticated occupational categories. Therefore, the data have been regrouped to conform to the occupational categories of the Roper study.

Figure 12

Perception of Class Conflict by Occupational Level: 1939 and 1976

% Saying Management and Workers Are in Opposition

(Whites Only)



self-identification the lower occupational groups had come to resemble the upper-white-collar group as of 1939. In this case, however, the convergence is in the opposite direction; the white-collar groups have moved toward the position taken by the wage workers in 1939. What is, however, most important to notice is that with reference both to class self-identification and to perception of conflict between the classes what has occurred is not so much an absolute diminution of the level of class consciousness as a homogenization across class in terms of class consciousness.

With respect to class self-identification, though not perception of class conflict, this brief look at the thirties has lent credence to the hypothesis that our contemporary affluent society is a less class conscious one. Furthermore, with respect to both class self-identification and perception of conflict, there has been a reduction in the degree to which these attitudes are differentiated along class lines; the attitudes of white- and blue-collar workers resemble one another more closely today than they did a generation ago. Still, what is perhaps most striking about the data from the nineteen-thirties is that, even then, the level of class-consciousness -- especially as measured by class self-identification -- was quite low. Thus, although these data would indicate that class consciousness has further diminished in recent decades, there was not very much of it around before.

What Difference Does It Make?

Although social scientists have demonstrated empirically the links between class consciousness -- usually measured by class self-identification -- and political attitudes, partisanship, and voting, the relationship which Marx posits implicitly, that class consciousness is a prerequisite for political mobilization, has not been subjected to empirical test.[20] Sidney Verba and

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[20] The principal studies which demonstrate the link between class self-

his associates have proposed a group-consciousness model of political participation which they find useful in explaining participation among blacks. They find that American blacks who are race conscious are more participant than would have been expected on the basis of their socio-economic characteristics.[21] Although their findings confirm the Marxian logic, they deal with the mobilization of race, not class, groupings.[22]

Class Consciousness and Participation: In terms of the various aspects of class consciousness which have been delineated, it is plausible to expect that each of them would be positively related to political participation: that those who identify with the working class, who think that workers do not get a fair share of society's rewards, who see the interests of workers and management as being in opposition, and who think that workers should stick together would be more participant. If one of these aspects had to be

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identification and political attitudes and behavior in the American context include: Richard Centers, The Psychology of Social Class (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949); Oscar Glantz, "Class Consciousness and Political Solidarity," American Sociological Review, XXXIII (August, 1958), 375-385; Philip Converse, "The Shifting Role of Class in Political Attitudes and Behavior," in Readings in Social Psychology, ed. by Eleanor E. Maccoby, Theodore M. Newcomb, and Eugene L. Hartley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), p. 388-399; Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Donald E. Stokes and Warren E. Miller, The American Voter (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), Chap. 13; Avery M. Guest, "Class Consciousness and American Political Attitudes," Social Forces, LIV (June, 1974), 496-510; Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Unemployment, Class Consciousness and Radical Politics."

[21] Sidney Verba, Bashiruddin Ahmed, and Anil Bhatt, Caste, Class and Politics (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971), chaps ix-x, and Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, Participation in America (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972), chap. 10.

[22] Verba and Nie do mention in passing (p. 253) that there is no analogous group consciousness among lower-status whites which has the mobilizing effect which race consciousness has for blacks. However, they present no data to support this conclusion. Furthermore, given their definition of race consciousness, which will be discussed, it is not altogether clear how they would define group consciousness among lower-status whites.

singled out for particular potency, it would seem logical that there would be a particularly strong relationship between an orientation to worker solidarity and participation. The data presented in Table 3 do not conform to these expectations in the least. In no case is there a strong positive relationship between class consciousness and either score on an additive scale measuring political participation or organizational memberships; and in only one case, perceiving class conflict, is there even a weak positive relationship. With respect to seeing workers' pay as fair, there is no relationship whatsoever; and with respect to open-ended class self-identification and believing that workers should stick together -- the one variable for which the strongest positive relationship was expected -- the relationship between class consciousness and participation is actually negative.[23] Ironically, the strongest single relationship is the negative relationship between solidarity and the participation scale; those who think workers should stick together are actually less participant than those who have a more individualistic approach.

Race Consciousness and Participation: The finding that group consciousness does not enhance political participation among workers seems to conflict with the finding of Verba et al. that group consciousness raises participation

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[23] The figures for closed-ended class self-identification are remarkably similar to those for open ended class self-id:

	Closed Ended Class Self-Id		
	Working	Middle	
Participation			
High	12	15	
Medium	30	36	
Low	58	49	
	100%	100%	-.17
Gamma			
Organizational membership			
Yes	26%	32%	
No	74	68	
Gamma	100%	100%	-.15

Table 3

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BY CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

(Blue Collar Workers Only)

	IDENTITY@		FAIRNESS		CONFLICT		SOLIDARITY	
	Working	Other	Unfair	Fair	Opposed	The Same	Together	On Own
PARTICIPATION								
High	8%	14%	13%	14%	19%	13%	11%	17%
Medium	32	36	35	33	34	38	31	44
Low	60	50	52	52	47	49	58	39
	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
GAMMA		-.20		.00		.08		-.32
ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP								
Yes	26%	30%	28%	27%	35%	29%	28%	32%
No	74	70	72	73	65	71	72	68
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
GAMMA		-.10		.00		.13		-.11

@Open-ended Class Self-Identification

among blacks. It may well be, however, that group consciousness works differently for workers and blacks. We can give a modest test to this hypothesis by returning to the data on race consciousness among blacks.

Table 4 presents data on the relationships between class and race consciousness and political participation for blacks. As was the case when all blue-collar workers were considered, the single most outstanding relationship when it comes to class consciousness is the negative relationship between orientation to worker solidarity and the participation scale; blacks who feel that workers should stick together are less likely than their more individualistic counterparts to be politically active. With respect to seeing class conflict, there is no difference between blacks who see opposition between the classes and those who do not in terms of participation. When it comes to race consciousness the pattern is somewhat more confusing. What is clear, however, is that race consciousness -- at least as defined by seeing the interests of the races as being fundamentally opposed and thinking that blacks should stick together -- does not enhance participation among blacks. The pattern is not especially clear-cut, but, if anything, race consciousness seems to depress participation. In this case, however, the strongest relationships are the negative relationships between seeing conflict between the races and the participation scale and between thinking blacks should stick together and organizational membership.

It may be that the source of the discrepancy between Verba et al.'s findings and those presented here is the near decade which intervened between the collection of their data in 1967, and the Metropolitan Work Force Survey, conducted in 1976. Although there is no way to tell this hypothesis, it seems plausible to suggest that the mid-sixties were special, at least insofar as these matters are concerned. Race consciousness might well mean something quite different in the context of the economically strained, politically cynical

Table 4

PARTICIPATION BY RACE AND CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

(Blacks Only)

	CONFLICT				SOLIDARITY			
	Workers		Blacks		Workers		Blacks	
	Opposed	The Same	Opposed	The Same	Together	On Own	Together	On Own
PARTICIPATION								
High	13%	20%	10%	22%	14%	24%	15%	22%
Medium	34	23	24	28	24	32	29	15
Low	53	57	65	50	61	45	56	63
	100%	100%	99%	100%	99%	101%	100%	100%
GAMMA		.00		-.33		-.28		.06
ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERSHIP								
Yes	35%	35%	36%	34%	34%	37%	28%	44%
No	65	65	64	66	66	63	72	56
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
GAMMA		.00		.03		-.08		-.35

43

mid-seventies than it did a decade before.

We can investigate further the question of whether group consciousness works differently for blacks and workers using data from the 1976 Election Study carried out by the Center for Political Studies at the University of Michigan. In that survey, respondents were asked whether they felt close to members of a wide variety of groups: poor people, Southerners, Catholics, blacks, women, liberals, older people, workingmen and so on. They were then asked to select the group to which they felt closest. This measure of closeness to groups approximates the measure of class identification we have been using with two important qualifications. The question is closed-ended; therefore, all respondents have some kind of identification -- whether it be with a religious, regional, age, race, sex, ideological or class grouping. Furthermore, respondents were asked whether they felt close to "workingmen" rather than to the "working class." Still, the measure is sufficiently close to the one used here to justify a brief look.

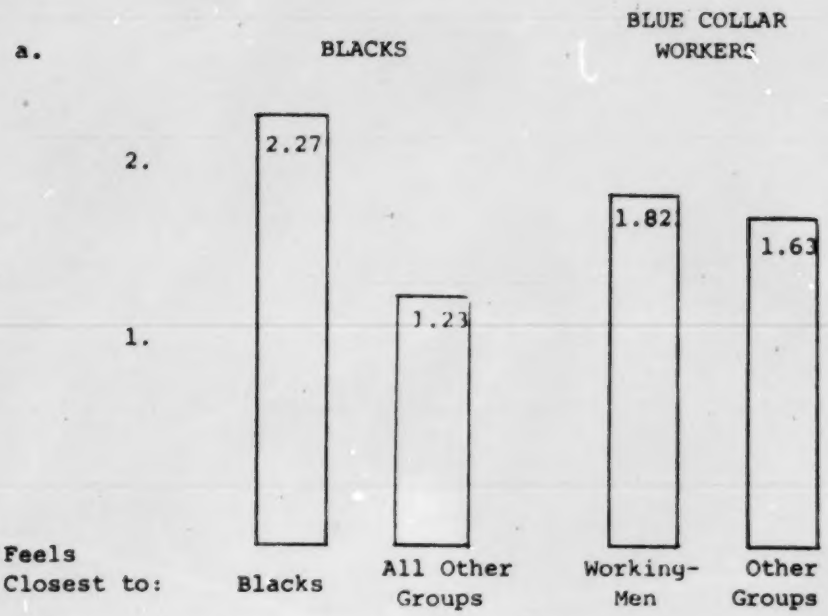
The pattern in Figure 13-a, which presents data on the average number of political activities (out of a possible seventeen national, local and electoral activities) undertaken by those who identify with various groups, is somewhat complicated. Among blacks, those who feel closest to blacks -- 29 per cent of all the black respondents -- are clearly more participant than those who identify with other groups. The average score for blacks who feel close to other blacks is 2.27, for all other blacks 1.23. With respect to blue-collar workers, for the first time a measure of class consciousness seems to predict political participation. Although the difference is quite a bit smaller than that for blacks, the 22 per cent of blue-collar workers who feel closest to workingmen are more participant

Figure 13

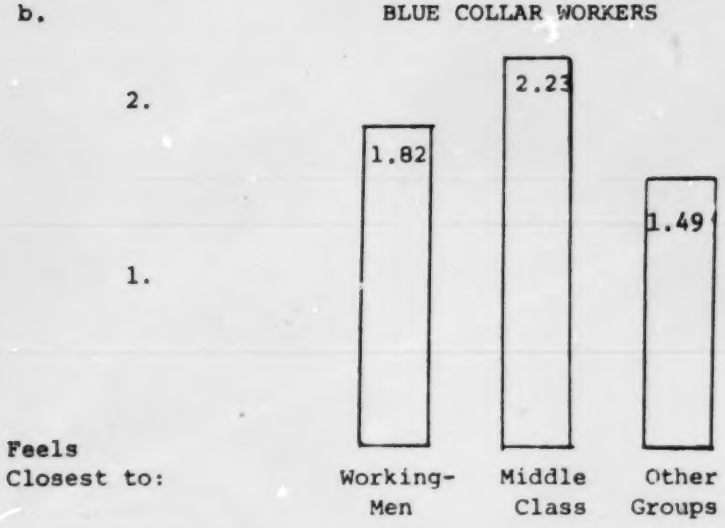
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION BY GROUP IDENTITY

Average Number of Political Activities

a.



b.



Source: 1976 Election Study, Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan.

than other blue-collar workers: the average score for those who feel closest to workingmen is 1.82, for other blue-collar workers 1.63. However, when those who feel closest to the middle class are separated out in Figure 13-b, the pattern changes. Those who feel closest to the middle class have an average score of 2.23 and are clearly the most participant of the blue-collar groups. When this relatively participant group -- who make up 15 per cent of all blue-collar respondents -- is taken out, the participation score of blue-collar workers who identify with other groups drops to 1.49. Thus, it is too simple to say that working class consciousness, as measured by feelings of group closeness, acts as a catalyst to political action, for middle class consciousness seems to be even more powerful as a precipitant of political activity.[24]

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[24] Because socio-economic status is such a powerful predictor of political activity, it seemed prudent to test these relationships within SES groupings. As shown by the data below the basic pattern is by and large unchanged when SES is controlled: among blacks, those who feel close to other blacks are more participant -- except among lower-status respondents; among blue-collar workers, those who feel close to the middle class are unambiguously the most active -- except among high SES respondents. (The SES scale was constructed by weighting equally education, family income and occupational prestige and adding them. A score was assigned to all respondents who were then divided into three equal groups. Not surprisingly, both blacks and blue-collar are overrepresented in the low SES category.)

Participation by Group Identity by SES
(Average Number of Political Activities)

	BLACKS		BLUE COLLAR WORKERS		
Closest to:	BLACKS	OTHER GROUPS	MIDDLE CLASS	WORKING-MEN	OTHER GROUPS
SES: Low	1.02	1.13	1.58	1.16	1.07
Middle	3.49	2.40	2.32	2.08	2.20
High	3.87	1.50	3.52	3.70	3.04

Source: 1976 Election Study, Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan.

The data on group identity reduce somewhat the discrepancy between these findings and those of Verba and his associates. At least with respect to group identity, race consciousness seems to have a positive effect on political activity which working class consciousness does not. Another possible source of that discrepancy is the alternative definitions of group consciousness which are used. The operational definition of group consciousness used by Verba et al is derived from responses to open-ended questions about the groups that were in conflict in their communities and about the problems faced in their personal lives and communities and in the nation. Those who mentioned race were considered to be group conscious. While the relationship between group consciousness as so defined and political participation among blacks is quite impressive, it is somewhat difficult to know just what is being measured. Certainly, this is not a measure of one of the aspects of group consciousness as discussed by Mills. Because it is based on responses to open-ended questions, it perhaps makes more sense to consider this a measure of the salience of racial problems. Using the data from the University of Michigan Election Study it is possible to reproduce a more modest version of this measure. Respondents were asked a single open-ended question about the important problems facing the country and permitted to list three such problems. However, since only four of the blacks polled mentioned race in enumerating national problems, it is impossible to draw any inferences about the relationship between political activity and the salience of racial problems for blacks.

To summarize the findings, it is clear that class consciousness is not a prerequisite for political activity among workers. On none of the various measures are class conscious workers more participant, and on some they are actually less active. Ironically, the strongest relationship

is the negative one between commitment to worker solidarity and political activity. With respect race consciousness, the results are more ambiguous. On some measures, seeing conflict between the races and thinking that blacks should stick together, race consciousness does not predict political participation. However, blacks who feel closest to other blacks are more likely to be politically active.

Conclusion

The conclusion which must be drawn from this somewhat discursive discussion is that class consciousness is a concept of limited utility in understanding the contemporary American working class and its politics. First of all, when a multidimensional measure is applied to the attitudes of blue-collar workers, it turns out that there just is not very much class consciousness around these days. Furthermore, for reasons which are obscure, the various aspects of class consciousness do not form a coherent belief system: those who are class conscious on one measure are not necessarily conscious on others.

Several hypotheses proposed to explain the circumstances under which class consciousness incubates and its absence in the American setting were then investigated. It turns out that class consciousness is not -- as Marx predicted that it would be -- nurtured in factory settings, at least in contemporary America. With reference to two hypotheses commonly advanced to explain the special nature of working class politics in America: it seems that race consciousness among blacks does not necessarily inhibit the emergence of class consciousness; however, belief in the individualistic notions which comprise the American Dream of success does seem to dampen class consciousness among workers. Finally, at least

insofar as class self-identification is concerned, it seems that there has been a diminution in class consciousness since the politically intense nineteen-thirties although, even then,the level of class consciousness was quite low.

At least in terms of political participation, though not necessarily attitudes or voting, it does not seem that it would make very much difference if the level of class consciousness among American workers were higher, for class consciousness, at least as defined here, does not relate positively to political activity. It may be that this finding discredits one of the standard interpretations of the absence of socialist working class politics in the American context, that the failure of radical politics is a result of the low level of consciousness in the American working class. After all, we have seen the political effects of class consciousness, even among the few workers who have it, to be virtually nil. It may be, however, that as an analysis of the contemporary situation, this hoary interpretation is turned upside down. It may well be that the absence of a socialist political tradition is responsible for the dearth of class consciousness among contemporary workers rather than vice versa. At the very least, it seems fair to conclude that the potential political energy in contemporary America does not lie in the class consciousness of American workers.

Measuring Class Self-Identification: A Methodological Note

Although there seems to be no disagreement among social scientists on the importance of class consciousness, there is considerable controversy

about how it should be identified and measured. Although other authors have made similar attempts at multidimensional measures of class consciousness,[25] the measure of class consciousness which is most frequently used by American social scientists is class self-identification.

Measures of class self-identification have been the subject of controversy since they were introduced by social scientists in the late thirties. Basically, the implicit notion is that the class-conscious worker is one who responds "working class" when asked about the class to which he belongs. Although responses to such a question do correlate with other attitudes, although not -- as we have seen -- with political activity, there is considerable skepticism about the meaningfulness of such responses. One reason for these suspicions is that responses to these questions are notoriously sensitive to changes of wording. In his classic study The Psychology of Social Class, Richard Centers challenged the finding of earlier studies that most Americans think of themselves as being middle class.[26] When offered the choice among three classes -- upper, middle, and lower -- the overwhelming majority of Americans, between 79 per cent and 88 per cent depending upon the particular survey in question, identified with the middle class. When Centers added a fourth choice, "working class," the number of middle-class identifiers dropped sharply and a majority of those questioned,

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[25] See, for example, Jerome G. Manis and Bernard Meltzer. "Attitudes of Textile Workers to Class Structure," American Journal of Sociology, LX (July, 1954), 30-35; Oscar Glantz, "Class Consciousness and Political Solidarity;" John C. Leggett, "Uprootedness and Working Class Consciousness," American Journal of Sociology, LXVIII (May, 1963), 682-692.

[26] Pp. 30-31, 77.

52 per cent, indicated an identification with the working class. Centers' work was important not only in demonstrating the responsiveness of class self-identification to changes in the wording of questions, but also in questioning the conclusion of an earlier study that Americans think of themselves as belonging to the middle class.[27]

Centers' study may have been definitive in showing that the inclusion of a "working class" alternative changes the results of in terms of class self-identification, but his methodology is vulnerable to criticism on other grounds. A number of authors have pointed out that if class consciousness as measured by class self-identification implies something real about a person's sense of himself, then at the very least a person should be able to name the thing to which he feels a sense of belonging without being prompted.[28] This argues for the use of open-ended questions in which the respondent is asked to name the social class to which he feels he belongs without having any suggestions made to him as to what the names of these classes might be, as opposed to the closed-ended questions adopted by Centers and many investigators both before and after him. The open-ended has costs both in terms of the additional effort required to code open-ended responses and in terms of the number of responses ("I belong to the average class." "I belong to the American class." "I am in a class by

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[27] "The People of the United States -- A Self-Portrait," Fortune Magazine, February, 1940, p. 21.

[28] The point is made by several authors, among them H. J. Eysenck, "Social Attitude and Social Class," British Journal of Sociology, I (March, 1950), 56-66; and Neal Gross, "Social Class Identification in the Urban Community," American Sociological Review, XVIII (August, 1953), 398-404.

myself.") which fall into categories which are not analytically useful to social scientists. In spite of these costs, however, it seems that the minimal demand made upon the respondent by the open-ended question makes it a more appropriate measure of a person's sense of identity in class terms.

When this approach is taken, the number of working-class identifiers declines precipitously. The results reported here are not idiosyncratic. While closed-ended questions have consistently elicited substantial numbers of working-class identifiers, open-ended questions have evoked very few such responses: 56 per cent of the respondents to the SRC 1964 election survey identified with the working class in response to a closed-ended question offering "working" and "middle" as alternatives; but only 6 per cent mentioned the working-class when asked an open-ended question in an NORC survey conducted in the same year;[29] 51 per cent of those questioned by the SRC in 1976 chose the working-class alternative, while only 6 per cent of those contacted in the metropolitan work force survey identified with the working-class in response to an open-ended question.

How can these discrepant findings be explained? What is going on that explains the tendency for respondents to identify with the middle class in response to open-ended questions? It is impossible to be certain,

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[29] 1964 SRC figure taken from John P. Robinson, Robert Athanasiou, and Kendra B. Head, Measures of Occupational Attitudes and Occupational Characteristics (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1969), p. 371.

1964 NORC figure cited by Robert W. Hodge and Donald J. Treiman "Class Identification in the United States," American Journal of Sociology, LXXIII (March, 1968), p. 535. An additional 5 per cent of the NORC respondents spontaneously identified with the lower or upper-lower classes.

but one plausible conjecture is that what may be involved is a change in the criteria by which individuals identify themselves from identification in terms of productive role to identification in terms of life style. Students of social stratification have generally followed Weber in distinguishing multiple hierarchies of stratification in advanced societies.[30] As shown by the following example quoted by Hodge and Treiman, it is not only social scientists who perceive this ambiguity:

> A merchant marine seaman, who was buying an apartment house for investment purposes, owned a tan-colored Cadillac, which he had purchased in a used-car lot the year before because he thought it was a good buy. Since this four-year-old Cadillac was a large gasoline consumer, he was thinking of buying a Plymouth the next time he purchased a car. This 38-year-old business-minded seaman thought that he was 'about middle class as an apartment house owner, and working class as a merchant marine.'[31]

It seems reasonable to surmise that when manual workers are confronted with a dichotomous choice between working and middle-class identification they are relatively more likely to think in terms of economic position -- occupation and income -- as opposed to social status -- consumption, life style and aspirations -- than when they are asked an open-ended question. No evidence can be adduced in support of this conjecture, for few investigators have inquired as to what criteria people use to assign mem-

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[30] Max Weber, "Class, Status and Party," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, ed. and trans. by H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), Chap. vii.

[31] "Class Identification in the United States," p. 535, quoting I. Roger Yoshino, "The Stereotype of the Negro and His High-priced Car," Sociology and Social Research, XLIV (November-December, 1959), 114.

bership in various class groups.[32] This speculation gains a certain amount of credibility in view of the finding of Joseph A. Kahl that definitions of classes are sensitive to the context in which the interview takes place as well as to the precise nature of the questions asked: thus, when interviewed at home about neighbors respondents discuss class in terms of life style and consumption; a quite different pattern of responses emerges from interviews conducted at work.[33] Summarizing Kahl's findings, Harold L. Wilensky puts the matter succinctly: "The average American is a Veblenian at home, a modified Marxist at work."[34]

Given the sensitivity of class self-identification to changes in the wording of questions and the ambiguity of what Americans have in mind when

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[32] Centers did ask his respondents what puts a person into various classes. Unfortunately, the way he posed the question renders the responses virtually useless for solving the puzzle which has been posed. First he asked his respondents into what class they would place various occupations such as factory workers or salesmen. Then he inquired what other criteria besides occupation define the various classes. Thus, we cannot ascertain the importance of occupation as a defining criterion relative to other factors such as education, way of life or income.

Manis and Meltzer asked questions about bases of class placement in a more helpful format and found that wealth was cited as the defining criterion of class membership three times more often than any other; occupation was the runner-up criterion. "Attitudes of Textile Workers," p. 32. Unfortunately, these findings, however relevant, are marred by the special nature of their sample, ninety unionized textile workers in Paterson, New Jersey, and by the low response rate, less than half.

In the British context, David Butler and Donald Stokes found that occupation is by far the most frequently cited characteristic in characterizing the classes. Political Change in Britain (2d ed., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), p. 70.

[33] The American Class Structure (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956), p. 86.

[34] "Class, Class Consciousness and American Workers," in Labor in a Changing America, ed. by William Haber (New York: Basic Books, 1966), p. 19.

they think in class terms, should we not, then, conclude that the measure is meaningless? Responses to three successive questions asked in 1956-60 SRC panel study would indicate that class self-identification may have greater personal meaning than the foregoing might suggest. In spite of the instability shown by responses to different questions about class self-identification, individual responses to identical closed-ended questions show remarkable stability over time. As shown in Table 5, about three-fourths of those who identified with either the working or middle class in response to a forced choice identified with the same class when asked in a successive survey. This finding takes on added meaning when the comparison with the stability of partisan identification over time is made. Partisan identification shows somewhat greater stability over time than class identification: about 85 per cent of those who identified as Democrats or Republicans identified with the same party in a successive survey; however, the figures are somewhat lower when independents are included in the tabulation.[35] The rough similarity in terms of stability over time between party and class identification is reassuring. Although the meaningfulness of partisan identification has been questioned recently, it has had sufficient acceptance as a concept in the past that a whole literature in political science has been built around it. That class self-identification seems to behave similarly to party identification suggests that it is an identification which indicates something

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[35] When those who called themselves independents are included in the analysis the figures are as follows:

	1956-58	1958-60	1956-60
Percent identifying with the same party	78%	81%	76%

Table 5

Stability of Class and Party Identifications

Percent giving same identification in two surveys	1956-58	1958-60	1956-60
Class	74%	75%	74%
Party	86%	86%	83%

Source: Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, Election Panel Study.

about a person's sense of himself.

In general, the discussion of the measurement class self-identification reinforces the substantive conclusions already reached. Although the over-time stability of class self-identification lends credence to its significance as a measure, its sensitivity to question-wording renders it somewhat suspect. Furthermore, it is not clear what it is people have in mind when they respond to class self-identification items and, therefore, with what or whom they are identifying. This, it seems, is still further evidence for the absence of meaningful class consciousness in the contemporary American context.